

## VINCE RYAN, HARRIS COUNTY ATTORNEY

Press Conference: San Jacinto River Waste Pits Superfund Site

July 6, 2011

Today we are pleased to commend EPA and the responsible companies on a major milestone that has been achieved toward containing the dangerous dioxins from leaking into these waterways and bringing us a step closer to making this river cleaner and safer for the residents of Harris County.

After I was elected to office, we identified the San Jacinto River Waste Pits Superfund Site as a major environmental hazard affecting the people of Harris County. Not only are people who eat fish and crab near the site at risk, but so are people downstream all the way to the Galveston Bay.

The EPA process to clean up a contaminated site is long and after we first saw the lengthy "snake-like" process, we pushed for a "now" solution. We applaud the EPA in carefully investigating and assessing a contaminated site before taking decisive steps to cleanup but time was of the essence as dangerous dioxin was continuously leaking into the waterways and something needed to be done in the short-term.

As part of collaborative efforts between the County, State, and the responsible companies, a short-term plan to build a physical protective barrier to contain the release of dioxin into the river was developed which is now at almost near completion.

We are pleased that the Office of the Harris County Attorney in conjunction with Harris County Precinct Two has successfully worked with the EPA to create a greater role for local government than is typically experienced in superfund cases. In a first-of-its-kind, we successfully negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding between Harris County and the EPA that has led to collaborative efforts between the County, EPA, State, and the responsible companies in cleaning up the site. We continue working with EPA on the long-term remedial investigation and feasibility study and we are far from being done on reaching a permanent solution for the pits.

In an unprecedented effort, we have also partnered with federal and state agencies and Galveston Bay Foundation to increase community awareness and as part of this work, there is now fencing and buoys around the pits to warn people from entering the pits that were historically a popular recreational area. We have developed and put up more effective signs, and we are raising awareness about risks of eating fish and crab in the area. We still have long ways to go but we recognize the importance of building community awareness.